



eNews from Sen. Lisa Murkowski - Vol. 3, Issue 12: : [Visit Senator Murkowski's Web Site](#)
September 21 , 2007 [Download a Print Version](#)

Murkowski and Stevens Champion Rural Veterans Care

Earlier this month, the U.S. Senate approved an amendment to the Fiscal Year (FY) 2008 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Act that I sponsored with Senator Ted Stevens and Senator Dan Inouye (D-HI). The amendment requires the Veterans Administration (VA) to produce a report on the need to improve access to locally-provided care in areas far away from VA facilities.

The concern that I hear most frequently from Alaska veterans is just how upsetting it is to fly to Anchorage or Seattle to receive VA medical care that is available in their home communities. It is unconscionable that Alaska veterans would have to fly up to 2,000 miles for the care they have earned. This report will examine whether it is feasible to utilize existing facilities, like community health resources or the Alaska Native health system, to provide care at home.

The provision directs the VA to study the unique challenges and costs many veterans in rural areas face in obtaining VA medical services. This measure also calls for an assessment of the potential to increase local access to medical services for veterans in remote rural areas through partnerships with other government and local private health care providers.



Many of the returning Alaska National Guardsmen are from rural parts of the state.

Murkowski Urges the Senate to Pass the Indian Health Care Improvement Act

At a rally in the Capitol last week, I joined Senator Byron Dorgan (D-ND) to urge the Senate to reauthorize the Indian Health Care Improvement Act. More than a dozen Alaskans attended the rally.

I am a co-sponsor of S.1200, the Indian Health Care Improvement Act reauthorization bill in the current Congress. The bill passed out of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs on May 10 and was considered and passed by the Senate Finance Committee the day of the rally. The bill now will head to the Senate floor.

The Indian Health Care Improvement Act is crucial to the health of American Indians and Alaska Natives. The bill is the product of thousands, perhaps tens of thousands of hours of work by our tribal leaders. It is a bill that all of Indian Country can be proud of and indeed one that enjoys broad support from all corners of Indian Country. I urge my colleagues in the Senate to take action that is long overdue.



Senator Murkowski speaks at the Indian Health Care rally while Senators Baucus and Dorgan listen.

Murkowski Supports Increasing College Access and Affordability

Earlier this month I joined my Senate colleagues in passing the College Cost Reduction Act of 2007. The bill increases students' access to affordable education in college or through job training by increasing the amounts of Pell grants, putting a cap on student loan payments, providing for loan forgiveness and funding the new College Access Partnership Program.

This legislation makes higher education more affordable and accessible for students. Financial aid has not kept pace with the rising cost of college. By increasing the maximum dollar amounts of Pell Grants, making it easier to obtain federal aid and providing protection from unmanageable loan payments, we are giving more potential students access to an increasingly expensive endeavor.

The College Cost Reduction Act of 2007 also includes a provision that I fought for – The College Access Partnership Program. The program includes the following provisions:

- Expands borrower benefits for low income and Pell eligible students and provides assistance for students and families in dealing with the Free Application for Federal Student Aid and college applications;
- Provides professional development for guidance counselors, financial aid administrators and college admissions counselors in order to improve assistance to students; and,
- Funds outreach activities for students at-risk of not enrolling in higher education and provides funding to improve student preparedness for post-secondary entrance examinations.

Murkowski Calls for a Civilian and Diplomatic Surge in Iraq

Yesterday, I joined Senator Robert Casey (D-PA) in introducing an amendment to the Department of Defense Authorization Act calling for a civilian and diplomatic surge in Iraq.

When I visited Iraq in March, I came away with the impression that while we were seeing progress from the military surge, it was not being matched by a civilian surge of technocrats. Military progress alone will not provide for the conditions for a stable and secure Iraq.

Our amendment highlights the need to implement a civilian surge to ensure that all components of the U.S. government are contributing to assist the Iraqi government to strengthen its capabilities to provide essential government services. The entire U.S. government must be involved in the reconstruction process in Iraq – not just the Department of Defense and State Department. There is expertise in the other departments that needs to be tapped and utilized.



Senator Murkowski in Baghdad.

IRS Reminds Teachers, Parents and Students of Possible Tax Breaks

With the new school year under way, I wanted to pass along a reminder from the IRS about possible tax breaks to Alaskan educators, students and parents. It is a good idea to save all receipts for education-related expenses to take advantage of the following programs.

- The educator expense deduction, worth up to \$250, allows teachers and other educators to deduct the cost of books, supplies, equipment and software used in the classroom. Eligible educators include those who work at least 900 hours during a school year as a teacher, instructor, counselor, principal or aide in a public or private elementary or secondary school.
- Three key tax breaks—the tuition and fees deduction, the Hope credit and the lifetime learning credit—help parents and students pay for the cost of post-secondary education. All three are available, regardless of whether an eligible taxpayer itemizes their deductions. In tax-year 2005, taxpayers claimed tuition and fees deductions totaling nearly \$11 billion and education credits of almost \$6.2 billion.

For more information on these programs click [here](#).

U.S. Department of Education Calls for Fulbright Teacher Exchange Applications

The U.S. Department of State's Fulbright Teacher Exchange Program has announced that they are seeking applications from U.S. administrators and teachers at K-12 schools as well as two- and four-year colleges who wish to participate in an exchange abroad during the 2008-2009 academic year.

Since 1946, the Fulbright Teacher Exchange Program has helped nearly 23,000 teachers and administrators contribute to mutual understanding between the United States and countries around the world. If you are a full-time U.S. teacher or administrator, you may be eligible to apply to the regular program. For U.S. teachers, this opportunity involves a year, semester or six-week direct exchange of teaching positions with a counterpart in another country teaching the same subject(s) at the same level.

The deadline to apply is October 15, 2007. For more information visit <http://www.fulbrightexchanges.org>

Recycle Your Cell Phones Through the Cell Phones for Soldiers Program

If you have an old cell phone that you no longer use, I encourage you to donate it to the Cell Phones for Soldiers Program. Cell Phones for Soldiers recycles old and unwanted cell phones for cash. The money raised is used to purchase pre-paid calling cards which are distributed to U.S. troops.

Cell phones can be mailed in or dropped off at one of over 3,000 drop-off sites across the country. Drop off sites and mailing information can be found at www.cellphonesforsoldiers.com. Additionally, business owners can visit this website to sign up to become a drop-off location.



Senator Murkowski visits students at Sherrod Elementary in Palmer.

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